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TAGS: PREL KPAL EG IS IZ XP

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE MINISTERS: MIDDLE EAST PEACE MUST BE
"COMPREHENSIVE"

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) During its September 5 annual ministerial meeting, Arab League (AL) foreign ministers confirmed their support for President Bush's proposed meeting for Middle East peace, but stressed a comprehensive approach producing tangible results. AL Secretary General Amre Moussa said in a press conference after the meeting that upcoming peace talks must provide "solid results" to launch a "true peace process." Moussa called for "confidence building" measures from the Israeli side and criticized Israeli Foreign Minister Livni's recent statements that "lowered expectations" for the conference. Algerian Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci, who chaired the meeting, noted that "Syria's and Lebanon's participation in the conference was integral for its success." The AL affirmed that peace depends on an Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders and a negotiated settlement regarding Palestinian refugees in line with UN Security Council Resolution 194 from 1948, according to regional press.

¶2. (C) Speaking to the Ambassador on September 6, Moussa emphasized his belief that the U.S. is serious about peace, but that he doubts the Israeli attitude given public statements by Livni and other Israeli officials. The Ambassador pressed Moussa to encourage, rather than criticize, the Israelis, to which Moussa repeated his public call for Israel to "build confidence; they should at least declare a moratorium on settlements for six months." Moussa described Middle East Envoy Tony Blair's mission as "essential and necessary," in that his focus on economic development and security institutions will help with confidence building.

¶3. (SBU) Separately on September 6, AL Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef emphasized to poloff the importance of addressing all issues - Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese - "comprehensively." Accordingly, he said, there can be "no exclusion of parties, tracks or subjects" - Syria must participate in the proposed conference, and the issues of Jerusalem, borders, and refugees must all be on the table.

¶4. (SBU) On the internal Palestinian situation, Youssef continued, the League supports a return to the pre-June Hamas take-over of Gaza "status quo," and stands ready to assist in turning over institutions under Hamas control back to the Palestinian Authority. Returning to the pre-June status quo is a prerequisite for further dialog with Hamas, he said. Moussa stressed to the Ambassador that the status quo does not mean returning to a unity government, but rather that Hamas must return government buildings and facilities and stand down militarily.

¶5. (U) The AL also discussed other regional concerns, according to regional press. Regarding Iraq, the AL ministers affirmed support for the UN role and for efforts towards political and security stability, and urged Iraqi

leaders to work seriously towards national reconciliation. AL ministers agreed to open an account to collect donations for Iraqi refugees residing various Arab states, Medelci said in his press statement.

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